

EDUCATING THE INDIVIDUAL FOR A FREE WORLD SOCIETY*

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IT has been rightly said that our world is in crisis. Our world is in such an all-containing crisis as history has never witnessed. Small parts of the world have been in crisis before—nations, or even continents have been in crisis—but never before have the fates of 2,000 million people been so bound up together and so precariously balanced that they may all fall into chaos on the one side, or move into an ordered world society on the other.

Our crisis is a crisis in values, in the things men live by and for. This crisis, we know, cannot be ended by the imposition or by the revelation of a new Ten Commandments. It can be resolved for the better only through a change in the quality of human relations beginning in the family and the school and reaching out to the ends of the world.

How, through education, can we improve the quality of human relations so that men become fit to live together in a free world society? That is the problem of this paper.

Education is always a twofold process of relating the individual to society and at the same time assisting the individual to realize his potentialities for perception, reasoning, and physical-mental creation.

Societies are different all over the world, and education takes many different forms in them. I have studied education in two social classes in America, as well as among the Hopi, Navaho, and Papago Indians, in National Socialist Germany, in Athens of the Fifth Century B.C., and in Soviet Russia; and I find, of course, that education is different in these different societies. Education is different in that the individual is related differently to society; and education is also different in that the individual's perceptive, reasoning, and creative abilities develop differently in these diverse cultures.

A new society is in the making. We are uneasy and uncertain about the changes going on in our own vicinity and throughout the world—changes whose scope and significance we can hardly grasp. We are groping toward a world society which we trust will be a free, democratic world society. The education which is fitted to such a society will be different from any education that is now standard in any present-day society. What kind of education must we have to bring about a free society and to make such a society successful?

It must be an education which makes the individual able to participate as a free man in a world society. It must be an education which brings the

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individual and society together in such ways that there results a superior development of the individual's perceptive, reasoning, and creative abilities.

To have this kind of education in America, we must have a society which supports such an education. What are the essential characteristics of an American society which is educating its youth for participation in a free world society? There are three such characteristics.

First, the society rewards all of its members for constructive behavior which is within their power to perform. The man who is a carpenter is rewarded for doing his carpenter's work; and the man who is a surgeon is rewarded for his surgeon's work. The woman who is a mother and a house-wife is rewarded for this work, and the woman who is a teacher is rewarded for her teacher's work. By *reward* we mean social approval, social acceptance, as well as salary and wages. Such a society must not say to any group of its people: "You must all be day laborers, none of you can become lawyers or business men"; or "You must all be housewives, none of you can enter the professions"; or "There is no work for you, you must live on government or private charity."

A successful society gets from its members the common moralities of honesty, social responsibility, loyalty, kindness, and in return it gives social approval and food, clothing, and shelter. A successful family gets from its members these same common moralities and gives them affection, security, and the material necessities of life. This relation is not in the nature of a bargain, in which each party bids as low as possible and demands as much as possible. Rather, the family gives freely to its members and they respond, as human beings, by giving freely in return. Similarly with the larger social units.

The school, in our society, finds it particularly difficult to live up to the ideal of rewarding all of its members for constructive behavior. The school is actually a punishing rather than a rewarding institution for great numbers of children. This is due to the fact that the school was established, historically, to do a quick and efficient job of training children for a limited range of skills for which they had unequal aptitudes. Those who did well in acquiring these skills were praised and generally rewarded, by teachers and parents, while those who did poorly were scolded and generally punished until they either did better work or escaped from school. As the school expanded its scope and length until it included all the children for ten or twelve years of their lives, it gradually expanded its objectives and its methods so as to fit the new situation, but not rapidly enough to avoid becoming the most widely hated institution in our society.

Now the American schools are engaged in the long hard pull of making themselves into places where boys and girls with all kinds of potentialities and expectations can find constructive outlets for their developing energies.

My colleagues and I have engaged for several years in a study of the moral character development of youth of school age in a midwestern community.¹ This study brings out the fact of a reciprocal relation between good character and good adjustment in school. Those who are the most responsible, honest, loyal, and friendly are the ones who get the best grades, participate most in athletics and social activities. Two propositions follow with equal validity from this finding. First, those who find in the school the opportunity to use their ability constructively are rewarded by the school and they become honest, loyal, responsible, and friendly in the school situation. Second, those whose abilities do not find constructive outlet in the school are not rewarded by the school and they become irresponsible, disloyal, dishonest, and unfriendly in the school situation. Most of them drop out of school as soon as possible. Some of those who drop out of school find employment or some other sphere of constructive action for which they are rewarded, and they become honest, responsible, loyal, and friendly in this new situation. Others fail to find any situation which rewards them for constructive action and they become social misfits, generally irresponsible, dishonest, disloyal, and unfriendly.

This leads us to the principle that no school should attempt to keep a pupil in whom it cannot find something to reward. Most educators recognize this, and accordingly have attempted to broaden the program of the secondary school as more and more of our youth have remained in school until high school graduation. By providing a wide variety of vocational courses, by developing extracurricular programs in music, dramatics, sports, journalism, and other types of activity, they have made it possible for boys and girls with wide variations of interest and ability and of vocational expectation to be successful in school. Still, there is a substantial group of young people, mostly from the bottom of the social heap, who do not find constructive outlets in school, and therefore, for whom school has little character-building value. What they bring to school in the way of constructive ability and interest the school does not use, and consequently they learn little and quit school early.

The second characteristic of an American society which prepares its youth for participation in a free world society is that it relates children well to the smaller units of society—family, neighborhood, school class, and community. We believe that a good relation to a small group prepares one well for a good relation to a larger group. We do not know this with complete certainty, but the evidence is fairly convincing.

In the family the young child needs the complete, uncritical love which makes him feel that he "belongs." With assurance of the family's acceptance

¹ Robert J. Havighurst and Hilda Taba. *Adolescent Character and Personality*. Wiley, New York, 1949.

of him the child moves into a neighborhood play group and a school classroom expecting to be accepted and ready to be friendly and loyal and responsible. If in these groups he is also accepted and rewarded, he will move into the wider sphere of the community with attitudes of cooperation and responsibility and loyalty. From here the feeling of "belonging" can spread to include the nation and the world. Yet it does not always do so. Some individuals with strong feelings of loyalty and "belonging" to local communities or to geographical regions have very weak positive feelings or even negative feelings toward the nation or the international world. Some people become such ardent nationalists that they hate or fear all other nations. Here is an area that needs study. What in their earlier social experience distinguishes the chauvinistic nationalist from the internationalist?

Probably the proposition that a good childhood relation to smaller groups makes for a good adult relation to larger social groups expresses a truth that is necessary but not sufficient—i.e., an experience of affection, loyalty, and responsibility is necessary in smaller groups in childhood in order that one may have such a relation to larger groups in adulthood, but is not sufficient to guarantee that there will be such a relation to all larger groups. Perhaps something else must be added to the sense of "belonging" that comes from being loved and accepted in the smaller groups, something in the way of understanding how the welfare of the smaller group is bound up with the welfare of the larger group. Perhaps the person who has a concern for the welfare of all the people in his own community must understand that their welfare is bound up with the welfare of people throughout the nation and the world.

The third characteristic of an American society which prepares youth for a free world society is that it offers a wide variety of social roles for people with a wide variety of abilities, and interests, and expectations.

A wide variety of approved social roles is desirable in society because people want them. People want the freedom to "be themselves," to develop each one his own unique personality and to satisfy each one his own pattern of needs. It is a good society which permits a wide variety of behavior for its people, limited only by the principle that one person's freedom must not be indulged to restrict another person's freedom.

If the aim of society is to develop and nurture people who freely command their own abilities, who enjoy and are enjoyed by other people—the *Angst-frei Mensch*, as Freud called this person—then society must offer a wide choice of roles so that everyone can find roles which he enjoys.

That the American society has grown in its acceptance and appreciation of diverse social roles among people is best shown by what has happened to the roles of women during the past century. In present-day American society women have almost as wide a choice of roles as men do. Among modern

societies, only Soviet Russia offers as much freedom to women as the United States.

America treats women much better than it treats old people. Through many arbitrary practices attached to chronological age we deny the role of worker and earner to a large number of old people. At a time when infirmity, death of spouse, and death of friends are making some of the roles of middle age no longer tenable for older people, our society should be creating new social roles for them, instead of shrinking the existing ones. Old age usually brings the loss of the following satisfactory roles: wife or husband, breadwinner, member of an occupational group such as a labor union or a businessmen's organization, member of Rotary or Lions Club, community leader, church leader; and provides instead the bitter, barren roles of widow or widower, invalid, garrulous old man to whom nobody wants to listen, friendless person, miser, recluse, and dotard; the only new roles which yield a little pleasure are ones the society condescendingly tolerates as not fit for men and women in their prime—grandmother, grandfather, and old soak.

The society which can educate its youth for a free world will provide a wide range of approved social roles for people of all ages, social classes, races, and both sexes. Any restriction on access to desirable social roles which is not based solely on the individual's own abilities and personality makes the society which harbors such a restriction just that much less suitable as a source of world citizens. The present-day American society does maintain some of these restrictions. For example, people of color are denied an equal chance with white people for many of the highly prized positions in American life. Children of working-class parents are penalized as a group by the most popular intelligence tests and thereby guided into a limited range of vocational channels, while the children of middle-class parents, who are favored by these same tests, get a wider choice of occupations.

American youth should live in a society that is free enough to show them what freedom is, and thus they may become free enough to create a free world society.

The procedures suggested for educating the individual for a free world society, then, are aimed at making the individual a certain kind of person rather than teaching him some particular attitudes and knowledge about world interdependence and the politics of world organization.

The kind of person who will make a good world citizen is one who feels that he himself is a worthy person and that all other people are just as worthy as he is, or could be just as worthy if they had the same advantageous conditions of nurture as he has had. He accepts himself and he accepts others. He is one who has learned moral rules and has internalized them, but not in a rigid, irrational, compulsive form. His experience with moral rules should be such that he can change them when he and his fellows agree that they

should be changed. His superego will have a rational element which keeps it open to modification in the light of new understanding that he gains from studying the facts of an interdependent world.

This person operates at the highest level of moral character, that of moral principles which are open to criticism and to change on the basis of a reasoned interpretation of experience. He has the courage of his moral convictions, but he is not a blind and stubborn slave to moral convictions irrationally obtained and irrationally maintained.

One thinks in this connection of Jesus, who was able with assurance and serenity to flout the laws of his society because he had moral convictions and moral insight at a higher level. He made a scourge of cords and whipped the money-changers out of the temple. They were not disobeying a law, but he was convinced they were doing wrong. Then he healed a man on the Sabbath, which was against the law, and he dared the Pharisees to denounce him. And when the Pharisees sought to trap him by bringing before him a woman taken in adultery and asking him to judge her, he wrote with his finger in the dust, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her," and when they had gone away, one by one, he turned to the woman and said, "Go thy way; from henceforth sin no more." Jesus could disobey the laws of his society because he had moral principles which he knew were better and surer guides to behavior.

To produce world citizens in adequate numbers to bring about the creation and maintenance of a world society, America and other countries need an educative process which does the following necessary things:

1. Provides children with ample affection during infancy and childhood, so that they grow up believing society to be full of friends.
2. Provides children with systematic moral teaching backed by enough warning, scolding, and punishment to inculcate in them a conscience which controls their destructive and hostile impulses.
3. Gives children ample opportunity to work out the solutions to moral problems among themselves, without subordinating them always to the constraining authority of the elders. As Piaget has made clear to us, the child's experience in learning the rules of games and then later learning to adjust rules to the convenience of himself and his age-mates lays the basis for a democratic and rational approach to the observance and the making of moral rules. It seems quite certain that children in a democratic society acquire a rational element to the superego through the experience of making some of their own laws, under the benevolent guidance at first of adults, and then, in adolescence, often in opposition to adults.
4. Provides a wide variety of approved social roles in which children of all kinds of ability and personality can fit and feel successful.
5. Places before children worthy examples in the persons of teachers, club

leaders, community leaders. The importance of unconscious imitation in the child's formation of attitudes and habits seems to be established. The child very early forms the unconscious habit of imitating people who have prestige in his eyes. He learns much more from example than from precept. In the formation of his ideal self the child draws first of all upon his parents, but also, to a very great extent, upon attractive and successful young people in the community.

6. Teaches the youth to use reflective thinking in civic and economic matters. By reflective thinking is meant the foreseeing and weighing of consequences of alternative actions. When a person comes to a forked road in his life, so that he must take one turn or the other, he thinks reflectively about it when he explores the consequences of going the one direction and the other, and then weighs the consequences in making his decision. He does not think reflectively when he imitates some "authority" or when he blindly and stubbornly chooses one way without giving consideration to the other.

Reflective thinking does not come naturally or easily. It must be taught skillfully and patiently in situations of growing complexity. Some of the best teaching of our day is being done by secondary school teachers in the fields especially of the social and the natural sciences, where they are attacking intelligently the problem of teaching reflective thinking.

This, in outline and in essence, is the kind of education needed for a free world society. How it draws on the knowledge and the insights of psychology, sociology, and psychiatry is clear. And it turns out to be the same thing as an educational program for mental health in the modern world. If we educate for mental health, we educate world citizens. If we educate world citizens, we educate for mental health.

What this world needs, and what our educative processes must produce, is the kind of person who can live at peace first with himself and then with others.